

Press Release

September 22, 2009

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SECRETARY NAPOLITANO AND USCIS DIRECTOR MAYORKAS LAUNCH REDESIGNED USCIS WEBSITE

WASHINGTON—Department of Homeland Security (DHS) Secretary Janet Napolitano, U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) Director Alejandro Mayorkas and Federal Chief Performance Officer Jeff Zients today launched a redesigned USCIS website—available in English and Spanish—a major effort which fulfills President Obama’s pledge to offer enhanced navigation tools for the public to access immigration information and review case status.

“Transparency and openness are critical to effective immigration and citizenship policies,” said Secretary Napolitano. “USCIS’ new website provides the public with the latest tools—from text messages to emails—to improve responsiveness and access to immigration services.”

“The redesigned website we are launching today reflects our commitment to listening to the public and creating a better experience for the hundreds of thousands of USCIS customers we serve,” said USCIS Director Mayorkas. “This effort is the first step toward creating a more innovative, customer-centric experience that meets the nation’s citizenship and immigration needs.”

Secretary Napolitano and Director Mayorkas made the announcement at a press conference at USCIS Headquarters, highlighting the Obama administration’s commitment to achieving government accessibility and transparency using online and new media tools.

The new USCIS website provides a one-stop location for immigration services and information—including an innovative service called *My Case Status*, which allows immigration customers to receive alerts on the status of their applications via text message and e-mail.

Other new features include a *Where to Start* tool to guide users through the navigation process; a simplified way to track individual case status; local and national case processing times; an improved search engine; and a new *Information Dashboard* feature allowing users to access national immigration trends associated with immigration petitions and applications.

Visit the new sites at www.uscis.gov and www.uscis.gov/espanol.

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USCIS.gov Redesign Highlights *A More Customer-centric Website*

Background

On June 25, President Obama announced that in the next 90 days USCIS would launch a vastly improved USCIS.gov public website to help customers navigate the immigration system and remain up-to-date regarding their case status. USCIS has committed to delivering on this promise by incorporating both internal and external stakeholder feedback.

From March to June 2009, USCIS surveyed a broad range of users regarding general functionality of our website through focus group discussions, usability tests, and public surveys. Groups surveyed in this process included national and local stakeholders, customers and USCIS employees.

The Redesigned USCIS.gov

Based on these findings, the redesigned USCIS.gov website is more customer-centric, providing customers with a “one-stop shop” for immigration services and information. The new site features clear language that meets the needs of our customers, makes customer service tools more accessible, simplifies website navigation and improves search capability.

New features on the redesigned site include:

- A customer-centric home page which allows customers to search for information either based on who they are and what they want to do in the new ‘Where to Start’ tool or by major immigration topics.
- ‘My Case Status’ replaced ‘Case Status Online’ and added a new option for customers to receive alerts through text messages sent to their mobile phones.
- Customers, for the first time, have access to national volumes and trends associated with key immigration petitions in the form of an information dashboard. In addition to increasing transparency, this adds context to the customer experience by enhancing their understanding of current level of receipts, completions, and number of applications pending. Customers are also able to download data supporting the dashboard.
- An improved and maturing search engine which employs a combination of technologies to enable better, faster searches on USCIS.gov.

Existing website services that are enhanced with the redesign include:

- Reorganizing our existing content to make information easier to find.
- Transforming content so that it is written clearly and meets the needs of our customers.
- Better context for customers about the adjudication process and how their case is progressing through ‘My Case Status.’ Information provided to customers regarding their case includes:
 - The processing step in which their case is currently located
 - How the current processing step relates to the overall process
 - National goals and average processing times
 - Specific processing times for the office where their case is pending

www.uscis.gov

Web Redesign & Agency Transformation

This project closely aligns with USCIS multi-year business transformation initiative by bringing customers closer to an account-based model. Improvements made to the website in this redesign will accommodate any expansion of services, including those that result from the USCIS transformation initiative.

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USCIS.gov 'My Case Status' *Enhanced Customer Service Tools*

Background

On June 25, President Obama announced that in the next 90 days USCIS would launch a vastly improved USCIS.gov public website to help customers navigate the immigration system and remain up-to-date regarding their case status. USCIS has committed to delivering on this promise by incorporating both internal and external stakeholder feedback.

Your Case Status and Processing Times

Based on feedback we received from focus groups, usability tests and public surveys, the redesigned USCIS.gov website enhances our customer service tools and makes them more accessible. All of the tools are now available directly from the homepage.

On the old USCIS website, 'Case Status Online' provided users with their case status information via the web. It allowed customers to create an account to receive automated emails when their cases were updated. Processing times of local offices and service centers were also available before the redesign, but these times were only displayed in a table on a different page of the site.

On the redesigned USCIS.gov website, 'My Case Status' replaces 'Case Status Online' and adds a new option for customers to receive alerts through text messages sent to their mobile phones.



'My Case Status' gives customers information about their cases in the context of the adjudication process and shows relevant processing times, all on the same screen. At the top of the page, customers will be able to view all of the process steps associated with the application. Descriptions are provided so that customers may anticipate future actions on their cases. The panel at the bottom of the 'My Case Status' page provides a snapshot of form-specific processing times to help customers estimate their application's typical processing time.

Customers can find information regarding their pending cases including:

- The processing step in which their case is currently located
- How the current processing step relates to the overall process
- National goals and average processing times
- Specific processing times for the office where their case is pending

Once a customer signs into his/her secure account, 'My Case Status' provides the option to receive emails and/or text message notifications once a case has been updated. For those representing many customers, each case may have different email/text settings. Standard text messaging rates apply.

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USCIS.gov ‘Where to Start’ A More Customer-centric Homepage

Background

On June 25, President Obama announced that in the next 90 days USCIS would launch a vastly improved USCIS.gov public website to help customers navigate the immigration system and remain up-to-date regarding their case status. USCIS has committed to delivering on this promise by incorporating both internal and external stakeholder feedback.

New to Our Website?

Based on feedback we received from focus groups, usability tests and public surveys, the redesigned USCIS.gov website is more customer-centric, providing users with a “one-stop shop” for immigration services and information.



A new function on the homepage includes the ‘Where to Start’ tool, offering customers the ability to find information based on the status they hold and the benefit or information they seek.

Before the redesign, customers described using the USCIS website as “frustrating” and “hard to navigate.” The new ‘Where to Start’ tool, located on the top left of the homepage, allows for easy, direct navigation to information.

By clicking on the first drop down menu, customers have the opportunity to choose who they are from a number of options, such as, “I am...

- ...a green card holder”
- ...a U.S. citizen”
- ...a refugee”
- ...an employer” etc.

After selecting who they are, clicking on the second drop down menu allows them to select what they want to do, for example, “and I want to...

- ...become a permanent resident”
- ...bring my fiancé to the United States”
- ...work in the United States”
- ...learn more about E-Verify.”

The ‘Where to Start’ tool will take users to the information they want, without having to search the entire website.

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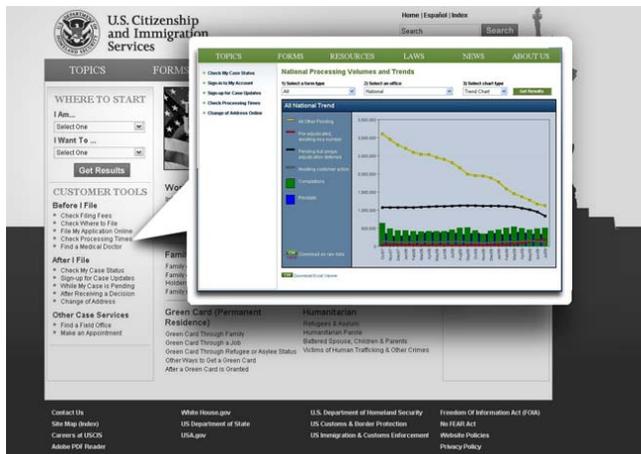
USCIS.gov 'National Dashboard' *National and Local Processing Volumes and Trends*

Background

On June 25, President Obama announced that in the next 90 days USCIS would launch a vastly improved USCIS.gov public website to help customers navigate the immigration system and remain up-to-date regarding their case status. USCIS has committed to delivering on this promise by incorporating both internal and external stakeholder feedback.

Processing Volumes and Trends

The 'National Dashboard' is a new function available on the redesigned USCIS.gov website. This tool will give customers insight into current USCIS form processing times. The new National Dashboard has an easy to read graph, giving customers the option of viewing volumes as a bar or line graph, that provides customers the ability to compare overall processing volumes and trends at the national and local level.



- At the top of the National Dashboard page, customers will be able to narrow a request to a particular form type at a specific USCIS office and view volume information regarding each stage of the process.
- This same form type can be compared with the national volume information at the bottom of the page. Customers can view the data for the current month or as trend data over the past 24 months. Additionally, the data presented in the charts will be available for download.

We plan to initially deploy the National Dashboard with 10 different forms, including the Form I-485, Application to Register Permanent Residence or Adjust Status, and Form N-400, Application for Naturalization. Over the next year, this number will grow. We will also look to build upon this capability to provide additional information to the public.



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USCIS.gov – What’s Next *Future Website Enhancements*

Background

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The Redesigned USCIS.gov

From March to June 2009, USCIS surveyed a broad range of users regarding general functionality of our website through focus group discussions, usability tests, and public surveys. Based on these findings, the redesigned USCIS.gov website is more customer-centric, providing users with a “one-stop shop” for immigration services and information. The new site features clear language that meets the needs of our customers, easier accessibility to customer service tools, simplified website navigation and improved search capability.

What’s Next

USCIS is committed to making this site work for its customers and will actively manage the continued growth of the site to meet their evolving needs. USCIS personnel are already working on a series of future improvements and engaging with stakeholders to identify further enhancements.

Customers can expect the following changes in the upcoming months:

- More instructional and informational content via multimedia
- Simplified internet addresses for the most used topic areas
- Continual improvement of Spanish-language website
- The ability to sign up for news feeds regarding specific topics of interest
- Continued transparency of USCIS operations by making publicly available data accessible through the website
- Improved access to and searchability of forms
- The use of online surveys, focus groups, and other feedback mechanisms to solicit input regarding current site performance, content, and features

USCIS is interested in your feedback about USCIS.gov. Please take a moment to tell us what you think about the site by emailing us at uscis.webmaster@dhs.gov.



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USCIS.gov Key Features

Then and Now

Background

On June 25, President Obama announced that in the next 90 days USCIS would launch a vastly improved USCIS.gov public website to help customers navigate the immigration system and remain up-to-date regarding their case status. USCIS has committed to delivering on this promise by incorporating both internal and external stakeholder feedback.

Features and Improvements

Based on feedback we heard in focus groups, usability tests and public surveys, the improved design of USCIS.gov follows four core principles:

- A customer-centric homepage that provides applicants with a “one-stop shop” of immigration services information.
- Simplified navigation and improved search capability.
- Enhanced customer service tools including expanded case status information.
- Information that is written clearly and meets the needs of our customers.

The chart below outlines how we have applied these four core principles to key features of USCIS.gov.

Feature/ Improvement	That was THEN...	This is NOW...
Redesigned Homepage	The homepage was often viewed as cluttered and confusing. Navigation of the site was difficult.	The homepage has been redesigned to highlight the most critical and often used immigration information. The navigation of the site has been improved with a streamlined design, the use of plain language, and the addition of several new key features. As a result of these improvements, the time spent navigating and searching for information is reduced.
<i>Where to Start</i>	Visitors were often overwhelmed by the volume of information on the site and didn't know how or where to begin to look for their information.	The <i>Where To Start</i> tool provides a simple way to navigate the site. Users can identify their role and reason for visiting the site from more than 50 of the most common immigration scenarios and view information specific to their situation.
<i>Customer Tools</i>	Helpful customer tools were scattered through the site.	Now, <i>Customer Tools</i> , such as <i>Find a USCIS Office</i> and <i>Change my Address</i> are available directly from the homepage and organized by the phases of the immigration process.

Feature/ Improvement	That was THEN...	This is NOW...
<i>My Case Status</i>	Users received basic information about the status of their case.	Improved context about how the user's case is progressing, including: what step their case is in, position of that step in the entire process, description of that step, average national processing times, and processing times for the office where their case is pending.
<i>National Dashboard</i>	Basic processing time data was available through reports, but lacked context.	The new <i>National Dashboard</i> has an easy to read graph, giving customers the option of viewing volumes as a bar or line graph, that provides customers the ability to compare overall processing volumes and trends at the national and local level as well as downloading the data in raw form.
Email and Text Message Alerts	Users could create an account and receive email alerts about the status of their immigration case.	Individuals can now sign up for alerts via email, text message, or both. Customer representatives have the option to choose different settings for each of the cases in their portfolio.
Reorganized Forms Page	The immigration forms page did not appear organized. Users had to read through a long list to find the correct form for their application.	Forms are now organized by several topic areas, to make finding the correct form easier. A <i>Most Searched Forms</i> feature quickly presents users with the most commonly requested forms.
USCIS.gov in Spanish	Users had little Spanish-language content available to them.	This is the initial launch of USCIS.gov/español. The most requested information topics have been translated into Spanish. New information will be added on a continual basis. USCIS will continue to improve the content and features for Spanish speaking users, and engage the community to identify the need for further improvements.
Plain Language	Much of the content was written from a legal point of view and was therefore difficult for the average user to understand.	Over 250 pages of content have been written in plain language. In addition, we followed guidelines for "writing for the web" and used headings and bullets to make the site easier to read and easier to understand.
Search	The search feature did not always return desired results, frustrating users and increasing the time they spent looking for information.	The search engine has been upgraded and content reorganized to improve both the performance of the search engine and the relevance of the results.

Feature/ Improvement	That was THEN...	This is NOW...
Feedback	Opportunities for user feedback were few.	USCIS is implementing a new approach to the management of the site. We will continue to focus on being a customer-centric site by delivering the information and features users need. USCIS will continue to actively solicit feedback through focus groups, email, and other methods. This redesign is the first of many changes we expect to deliver to meet the evolving needs of our users.

Questions and Answers

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USCIS.gov Redesign

On June 25, President Obama announced that in the next 90 days USCIS would launch a vastly improved USCIS.gov public website to help customers navigate the immigration system and remain up-to-date regarding their case status. USCIS has committed to delivering on this promise by incorporating both internal and external stakeholder feedback.

Questions and Answers

Q. How will USCIS ensure that the new website will remain up-to-date?

A. USCIS will implement a new approach to the management of the site. We will continue to engage users and work to deliver the information and features they tell us they need. USCIS will actively solicit feedback through focus groups, email, and other methods. Please take a moment to tell us what you think about the site by sending an email to uscis.webmaster@dhs.gov.

Q. What will happen if a customer is given information on the website that is different from the information given by the National Customer Service Center (NCSC)?

A. The information posted on USCIS.gov will be the same information used by the call centers to answer customer inquiries. A large part of the redesign effort was a review of the content on the site. This review was conducted by collaborative groups that included subject matter experts, as well as customer service and communications staff. This collaboration allowed us to revamp the information available on the website and ensure that it matches that available from the NCSC. If you find incorrect information or are told something different by the NCSC than what you see on the site, please take a moment to let us know at uscis.webmaster@dhs.gov and we will ensure it is corrected.

Q. Will there be a way for representatives to update their addresses online?

A. Not at this time. The website redesign did not include changes to the online change of address system.

Q. Will USCIS provide more information in the case status emails than what is currently given?

A. The new 'My Case Status' feature will provide better context about how a customer's case is progressing. This includes what step their case is in, a description of that step, what the position of that step is in the process as a whole, average processing time for their case and processing time information for the office where their case is pending.

Q. How can customers sign up for the new function that will allow them to receive case status updates by text message?

A. Customers will be able to sign up to receive updates via text message on September 22, 2009 by selecting 'Sign-up for Case Updates' from the home page and creating an account or adding alerts to an existing account. Once a customer signs into his/her secure account, 'My Case Status' provides the option to receive emails and/or text message notifications once a case has been updated. The text message will let the customer know that there has been an update and direct them to login to their account to see what action has been taken on their case. For those representing many customers, each case may have different email/text settings.

Q. If an applicant receives a text message that there has been a change in the status of his or her application and then checks ‘My Case Status,’ will he or she be given more information? For example, will the online case status information note that an RFE (request for evidence) has been sent or that a case has been denied?

A. Yes, the customer will be able to access ‘My Case Status’ to view the latest action taken on their specific case.

Q. If a case is transferred from one USCIS office to another, will the ‘My Case Status’ function reflect which office it has been transferred to?

A. Yes, ‘My Case Status’ will indicate that the case has been transferred and to which office.

Q. If a customer checks his or her case status online and a decision has been made on the application or petition, will the case status say if it is approved or not?

A. This will depend on the action taken and the case type. Customers will receive a message stating that their case was approved or that a notice has been sent.

Q. If a customer checks his or her case status online after a decision has been made on the application or petition, how will the case status note if a Notice of Intent to Revoke has been issued?

A. The case status system will not display a Notice of Intent to Revoke.

Q. If a customer is sent a second Request for Evidence (RFE), what notification will he or she receive?

A. When a customer visits ‘My Case Status,’ the status message will reflect that a notice that has been sent and the processing step will display that the case is in “RFE.”

Q. When will applicants be able to file Form N-400 online?

A. The scope of the website redesign did not encompass electronic filing. Changes to electronic filing involve a larger operational impact that more closely aligns with USCIS’ multi-year business transformation initiative.

Q. Will you be able to create separate categories and separate web pages for the Cuban and Haitian program and Afghan/Iraqi Special Immigrant Visas?

A. Yes, we have created new pages that specifically cover these topics. Because there is not enough space on the homepage, these categories are not listed on the main page of the website. However, if you click on the ‘Green Card’ heading, the new page will list both the Cuban and Haitian and Afghan/Iraqi special immigrant visas under the ‘Other Ways to Get a Green Card’ sub-topic.